Image of Baba Yaga in Contemporary Children's and YA Books

From the first records of tales by Samuel Collins (The Present State of Russia, 1671) to fairy-tale anthologies collected by W. R. S. Ralston (Russian Folk-Tales, 1873), R. Nisbet Bain (Russian Fairy Tales, 1893) and Arthur Ransome (Old Peter's Russian Tales, 1916), Russian folk and fairy tales have always provided a source of inspiration for foreign writers, artists, musicians, and other creative minds. With the growing interest in Russian folktales among contemporary Anglophone children's and YA authors, I would like to explore the representation of Baba Yaga, one of the most prominent characters of Russian folklore, in such modern reworkings.

Known as the ambiguous mother and witch of the Russian folktale (Johns 2004), as well as a trickster, Baba Yaga generates more questions than answers. According to Johns, "Two very important tale roles are those of the villain, who harms or seeks to harm the protagonist, and the donor, who is helpful and gives the hero or heroine a magic agent." Baba Yaga, confoundingly, takes on both roles, sometimes within the same story. Do modern writers acknowledge this ambiguity of her character? What features do they attribute to her? How is she depicted in accompanying illustrations?

How and why modern children's and YA authors continue to mine this rich seam of Russian folklore heritage reshaping it to fit new contexts for a contemporary young readership? How do these reworked narratives embrace and reflect the contemporary concerns and ideologies? What actually remains of Russian folk culture after it passes through the numerous retellings? These are just some of the questions that this paper will investigate.

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Biography:

Ekaterina Shatalova holds a Master's degree in Victorian Literature from the University of Oxford. She is a member of the Union of Translators of Russia who enjoys translating children's TV shows and books. When not translating, she reviews books for British and Russian publishers. She is currently researching children's literature at the University of Glasgow as an Erasmus Mundus scholar.

University affiliation: University of Glasgow/Aarhus University
Home country: Russia
Email: 2488440s@student.gla.ac.uk